

Forbes

# The Retreat: A Wellness Resort That Takes Healing Seriously

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*I cover wellness and beauty.*



The luxury lofts at The Retreat offer floor-to-ceiling windows and spacious balconies. THE  
RETREAT

Upon arriving to the minimalist, stark white luxury lofts at [The Retreat](#), located just 40 minutes outside San Jose, Costa Rica, it's easy to presume your "retreat" here won't be much different than one you might find at some futuristic wellness resort in L.A.. But step outside onto your spacious balcony perched on a crystal mountain overlooking a lush valley where the only movement in sight comes not from a human, but from a creature in the canopy or the sky, you realize this is a *very* different view of the Pacific.



Architectural Digest's Feng Shui expert David Cho incorporated the five elements—wood, fire, water, earth and metal—into the design of The Retreat. [-] ANNA HAINES

The nature that Costa Rica is known for inspired the design of the property, with *Architectural Digest's* Feng Shui expert David Cho subtly incorporating the five key elements of this ancient Asian philosophy—wood, fire, water, earth and metal—into the interiors. The Retreat's location on a foundation of crystals—which makes their way into the water that feeds the property's organic farm and streams from the taps—inspired the resort's founder, Diana Stobo, to commission crystal art designer Rebecca Norman to create wall hangings throughout the space made of selenite, a white gypsum mineral believed to remove obstacles and negative energy. "Crystals bring up whatever needs to be healed so what better place to have a healing facility than on a crystal mountain," Stobo tells me.



“Crystals bring up whatever needs to be healed so what better place to have a healing facility than on a crystal mountain,” says The Retreat owner Diana Stobo. [-] ANNA HAINES

Why the focus on healing? The idea for The Retreat came from Stobo’s own healing journey. After going through in-vitro fertilization to get pregnant with her son, Stobo was unhappy dealing with a myriad of health issues. When she started throwing up blood, she went to the hospital and discovered she had a bleeding ulcer. She was prescribed a pill she would need to take for the rest of her life, but Stobo refused to accept this as the only solution. Witnessing her sister shrink a tumor through from the size of a grapefruit to a kidney bean through an elimination diet, Stobo began studying how to eat anti-inflammatory. Noticing how her emotional, physical and mental health improved, she devoted her life to sharing what she had learned with others. Her first book “Get Naked Fast”—a cookbook of anti-inflammatory recipes—was such a hit, Whole Foods asked her to tour the country, and she has since sold 650,000 copies.



Diana Stobo shares her knowledge of an anti-inflammatory diet through her approach to food at The Retreat. [-] THE RETREAT

Today, Stobo shares her knowledge of an anti-inflammatory diet through her approach to food at The Retreat. The resort's two restaurants, Sol Terrace and Gratitude Café, offer entirely anti-inflammatory menus, with 80% of the food sourced from the onsite organic farm. The breakfast, lunch and dinner (which is included in all the resort packages) are "chef's choice"—a daily set menu based on what's in season. The focus is plant-based with protein offered once daily at dinner—typically local and sustainably raised fish, chicken, beef or lamb. Everything is dairy and grain free, although they do have goat yogurt and cheese on occasion. While the food offerings may seem restrictive to some guests, Stobo says removing choice "releases the mind and lets people surrender to letting us control."



Diana Stobo says removing choice “releases the mind and lets people surrender to letting us control.” It’s why breakfast, lunch and dinner at The Retreat are a set menu. [-] ANNA HAINES

While not overly prescriptive, the food approach at The Retreat aims to give guests tools they can use at home, by learning about anti-inflammatory foods, either in their wellness cooking classes, a tea tasting ceremony or simply feeling how they affect their body each day. Stobo encourages guests to not shy from asking questions and getting involved, and has intentionally made the central kitchen of Sol Terrace open concept for this reason. The founder wants people to hear, smell and see the staff preparing their meal, to conjure childhood memories of being at home while mom cooks in the kitchen. “I want people to have the comfort of knowing they’re taken care of,” Stobo says.



“I want people to have the comfort of knowing they’re taken care of,” says owner Diana Stobo. ANNA HAINES

This feeling of home is not just strived for in the restaurant, but throughout the resort—“whenever someone comes back, we say, ‘welcome home,’ Stobo tells me. The intention is to make The Retreat a nurturing environment where guests can find not only themselves, but others in community. Without the kind of keep-to-yourself urban attitude you typically find at wellness resorts in the United States, the guests here—a surprising 40% of which are men—usually strike up conversation with each other and within days have shared tears over their struggles. For women going through a lonely transition in life, like menopause, The Retreat can be offer guests a place to feel held and understood.



Guests can take cooking classes to learn how to make Stobo's anti-inflammatory recipes—like gluten-free granola—at home. [-] ANNA HAINES

At 58-years-old, Stobo knows how difficult going through menopause can be, especially in a culture that tends to leave aging women in the dark. It's why she created The Retreat's latest package—"The Big M: Mastering Menopause." The minimum-7 day retreat is designed to provide the physical, emotional and spiritual guidance women going through peri-menopause, menopause and post-menopause are seeking. "The transition is not something we talk about, it's like puberty but backwards," says Stobo. Hoping to shed the taboo around this stage of life, Stobo wants to show women that they're "becoming a new person, with wisdom and peace."



Diana Stobo wants to show women that they're "becoming a new person, with wisdom and peace," with The Retreat's new menopause wellness program. [-] [THE RETREAT](#)

The menopause program starts with the body, offering movement classes that focus on strengthening the pelvic floor and core, building bone density, increasing fat metabolism and calming the mind. "What people don't realize is you need more weight-bearing, slow, deep exercise and not so much of it when you're older," says Stobo.





A meditation deck at The Retreat. ANNA HAINES

Another menopause misconception Stobo critiques is the common approach to food where women assume they just need to cut their diet to green juices and salads. “You need more protein and fat when you go through menopause but you also need to learn to be okay with that,” says Stobo. Its why the package includes wellness cooking classes that teach guests how to incorporate plant-based fats and proteins into their diet, as well as the emotional support needed to process the change in lifestyle.



Sessions like ‘Heart Wall Clearing’ in the menopause package help guests identify and release suppressed emotions. [-] THE RETREAT

That emotional support extends to healing deeper emotional wounds. “All the resentment and issues of your past you’ve pushed aside, when you hit menopause that’s when it comes up,” says Stobo. Through tarot cards and a ‘Self-Discovery Workshop’ included in the package, guests are able to work through the traumas that menopause might be surfacing. Similarly, the optional ‘Heart Wall Clearing’ session aims to identify and release suppressed emotions and align with your heart’s current desire. One guest, Aviva Sharp, nearing her seven day stay on the menopause package, tells me she feels like she is playing a connect-the-dots game of pleasure. “I think I’m changing my name to ‘Zen,’ she laughs. “If you had seen me the first day compared to now, I’m a totally different person.”



Classes at The Retreat range from yoga to pranayama (breathwork) to sound bowl healing. ANNA HAINES

This focus on transformative healing is not just for women going through menopause, it's the thorough line of much of the programming at The Retreat. Learning about Ayurveda in India, Stobo fell in love with the ancient practice and has incorporated the principles into The Retreat, with Pranayama breathwork classes, consultations with an Ayurvedic therapist to discover which of the three constitutions—Vata, Pitta or Kapha—you embody and what foods, movement and herbs you should incorporate into your lifestyle as a result.



One of two pools at The Retreat. ANNA HAINES

Ayurveda-inspired healing can also be found at Vida Mia spa with a variety of Ayurvedic treatments that range from a classic Ayurveda head, back and face massage to two- to three-hour sessions that involve two therapists and the pouring of a herbal milk or medicated oil over the forehead. But that's not the only ancient therapy employed here, the list of spa offerings is as long as it is diverse. Detoxing and energy healing treatments include an infrared sauna, chromotherapy, the Vichy shower, a Turkish hammam bathing ritual, vibration training on the Vibra Pro platform, electromagnetic healing on the Bemer mat and Watsu therapy in which you practice Zen shiatsu movements in a heated pool. There is also a crystal treatment for every need—whether you're seeking calm, acceptance, self-love, a digital detox or glowing skin. Those simply looking for some jet lag relief can opt for the 'Travel Recovery Massage' which incorporates reiki healing and focuses on the head to stimulate the lymphatic system, encouraging the release of toxins.



From infrared sauna to chromotherapy to Watsu therapy, Vida Mia spa has an impressive selection of treatments. [-] [THE RETREAT](#)

With so many spa offerings, it can be hard to choose, so Stobo has curated the most appropriate treatments for each package offered at The Retreat. Healing spa treatments for harmony and balance, for example, include three massages (one heart-opening deep tissue, one Chakra balancing, and one Ayurvedic), a milk bath ritual, crystal healing body scrub, Vichy water therapy, and an Ayurvedic facial. While most packages include an impressive number of spa treatments, spa-lovers can spend even more time at Vida Mia with the 'Luxury Spa Healing and Beautifying' package.



There are several hiking trails of varying difficulty levels accessible from The Retreat. ANNA HAINES

Healing at The Retreat is offered not only through the food and the spa, but in daily classes like ‘Sound Bowl Healing.’ Here, guests lie on the floor and are guided through an hour-long symphony of sound bowls, ocean drums, and Japanese wind chimes designed to take them on their own spiritual and emotional journey. One facilitator, Christina Medeiros, encourages guests to allow themselves to feel, “because feeling is healing,” she says. “We have to feel our emotions, if we don’t release emotions we can get very sick.”



"Feeling is healing," says sound bowl healer Christina Medeiros. ANNA HAINES

Even in her first month working at The Retreat, Christina says she has witnessed profound healing. "When you see that we're supporting people and letting people be vulnerable that's where transformation happens," she says. This sentiment is echoed by chef Sergio José Lôpez Castro, who now oversees the Via Mia spa restaurant, Gratitude Cafe. While leading me through a tea tasting experience overlooking the sunset, he tells me many guests open up to him, not just because he's a good listener, but because they're looking for support. "I've had many guests hug me when they say goodbye," he says. With 58% of the guests making return visits to The Retreat—some, according to Stobo, as many as three to four times a year—their farewell ought to be 'hasta luego' (see you later).